



LINCOLN CHAFEE

U.S. SENATOR

RHODE ISLAND

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CONTACT: Stephen Hourahan
202-224-6167

SENATOR CHAFEE'S STATEMENT ON ALBERTO GONZALES NOMINATION TO BE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Washington, DC – “The Administration adopted an aggressive legal strategy in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11th, 2001 as it sought to prevent future attacks and ascertain the scope of the threat facing our nation. It is now clear that the Administration badly overreached in certain areas, and I am saddened and angered by allegations of abuse of foreign detainees which have done significant damage to our image throughout the world. Although many Administration officials were involved in crafting its enemy combatant policies, I share the concerns of millions of Americans about the advice Mr. Gonzales gave to the President in this critical area.

Despite these reservations, I joined Senators from both parties in confirming Mr. Gonzales. During his career in public service, Mr. Gonzales has acquired a reputation for relative moderation, including his clashes with more conservative Justices on abortion cases during his tenure on the Texas Supreme Court.

There are many important issues facing the next Attorney General, including whether to renew expiring provisions of the USA Patriot Act. The new chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Arlen Specter, has vowed to pursue more aggressive oversight of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). During the confirmation hearing, Senator Specter obtained a pledge of cooperation from Mr. Gonzales to improve the working relationship between Congress and DOJ, which suffered during Attorney General Ashcroft's tenure. I know that Senator Specter will work doggedly to hold Mr. Gonzales to that pledge.

I take the Senate's advise and consent role very seriously. For example, last year I voted against one of President Bush's judicial nominees. However, I also believe that a President should be granted significant flexibility in choosing his Cabinet. For this reason, I voted for every one of President Clinton's nominees during my first year in the Senate.

Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle – including Senator John McCain, who spent more than five years as a POW in Vietnam and voted to confirm his nomination – are focused on punishing wrongdoers and avoiding any future mistreatment of detainees. This is an area that will merit continued close scrutiny by Congress, and I look forward to working with my colleagues as we seek to protect the American people without trampling on the values we cherish.”

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